

AYUTTHAYA HISTORICAL RESEARCH [AHR]

Ayutthaya City Island Bicycle Track I

The Somdet Phra Sri Nakharin Park Loop
By Ken May & Tricky Vandenberg

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AYUTTHAYA – CITY ISLAND BICYCLE TRACK II (The Somdet Phra Sri Nakharin Park Loop)

This bicycle tour has been designed to present the most important sites within Somdet Phra Sri Nakharin Park, which is a surprisingly “unseen” extension of the Ayutthaya Historical Park. This off-the-beaten-track bike route includes territory designated by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, as well as a few architectural gems along the way. This historic park is situated near the Siriyalai Palace, a modern residence used by Royal family members.

Somdet Phra Sri Nakharin Park was set up in honor of the late H.R.H Princess Sri Nagarindra Borommaracha Chonani, the mother of HM King Bhumibol Adulyadey (Rama IX). She was a very beloved woman all over Thailand. The Moken sea nomads in the southern Thai islands still refer to her fondly as Somdet Ya, roughly Royal Grandmother, while Northern hill tribe people called her Mae Fa Luang (Royal Mother of the Sky). She has also been fondly remembered as Princess Mother. She died on 18 July 1995 at the age of 95, and her funeral took place on 10 March 1996. A commemoration monument is set up in the middle of this park. The lush area also contains numerous historical ruins of significant beauty.

This bike trek features Khlong Tho (formerly known as Khlong Chakrai Yai) as a reoccurring reference point. This canal was a “khlong chuam maenam” - a dug waterway linking two rivers. The canal was important as it was the primary source of water for the Royal Palace area. It was also a connecting waterway and shortcut between Wat Choeng Tha, in which vicinity the royal barges were stationed, and Wat Phutthaisawan in the south.

The tour will take 5-6 hours depending on the time spent at each location point. A few highlights on this itinerary have been listed more for the sake of smoother navigation, although they, too, may appeal to many cyclists as points of interest. Individuals can choose where to stop according to their own tastes and time constraints. Also, note that this bike route could be easily linked to the Ayutthaya Historic Park bike tour (see Route 9 on this website).

If you are interested in viewing photographs of the temples in advance or would like additional historic information about these ruins, visit our website at www.ayutthaya-history.com.

Tips and Warnings

Bicycles can be rented in different locations on Soi 2 Naresuan Rd, which is the starting point of this tour. Bike rental costs 30-40 baht (about \$1) per day on average, which makes bike touring an inexpensive way to see the city. Ayutthaya’s terrain is mostly flat and easy to ride, but many streets and side roads are poorly marked, so use the map to simplify navigation.

Be cautious as traffic in and around Ayutthaya is sometimes chaotic and dangerous. Motor vehicles often fail to see cyclists and pedestrians, so you must closely watch out for *them*. Motorcycles are a particularly hazardous cause of local accidents. Dogs and potholes can also be dangerous, especially in remote areas. Weather can be very hot, so make sure to drink plenty of fluids and wear sun block. It is inadvisable to drive at night due to the lack of lighting and occasional recklessness of motor traffic.

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The theft of bicycles is uncommon in Ayutthaya, but backpacks and cameras have been stolen on rare occasions. It is best to keep valuables with you when visiting the historic sites on route.

If you would like some information about lodging and restaurant options, please visit: www.ayutthaya-info.com.

Who are we?

Ayutthaya Historical Research [AHR] consists of a small group of researchers/writers with the aim to promote Ayutthaya's cultural heritage. We are local expatriates who have been living in Ayutthaya for many years and would like to share our knowledge with future visitors. Therefore, we have personally tested each of these suggested routes by cycling and/or walking. More information on the authors can be found at: <http://www.ayutthaya-history.com/Authors.html>

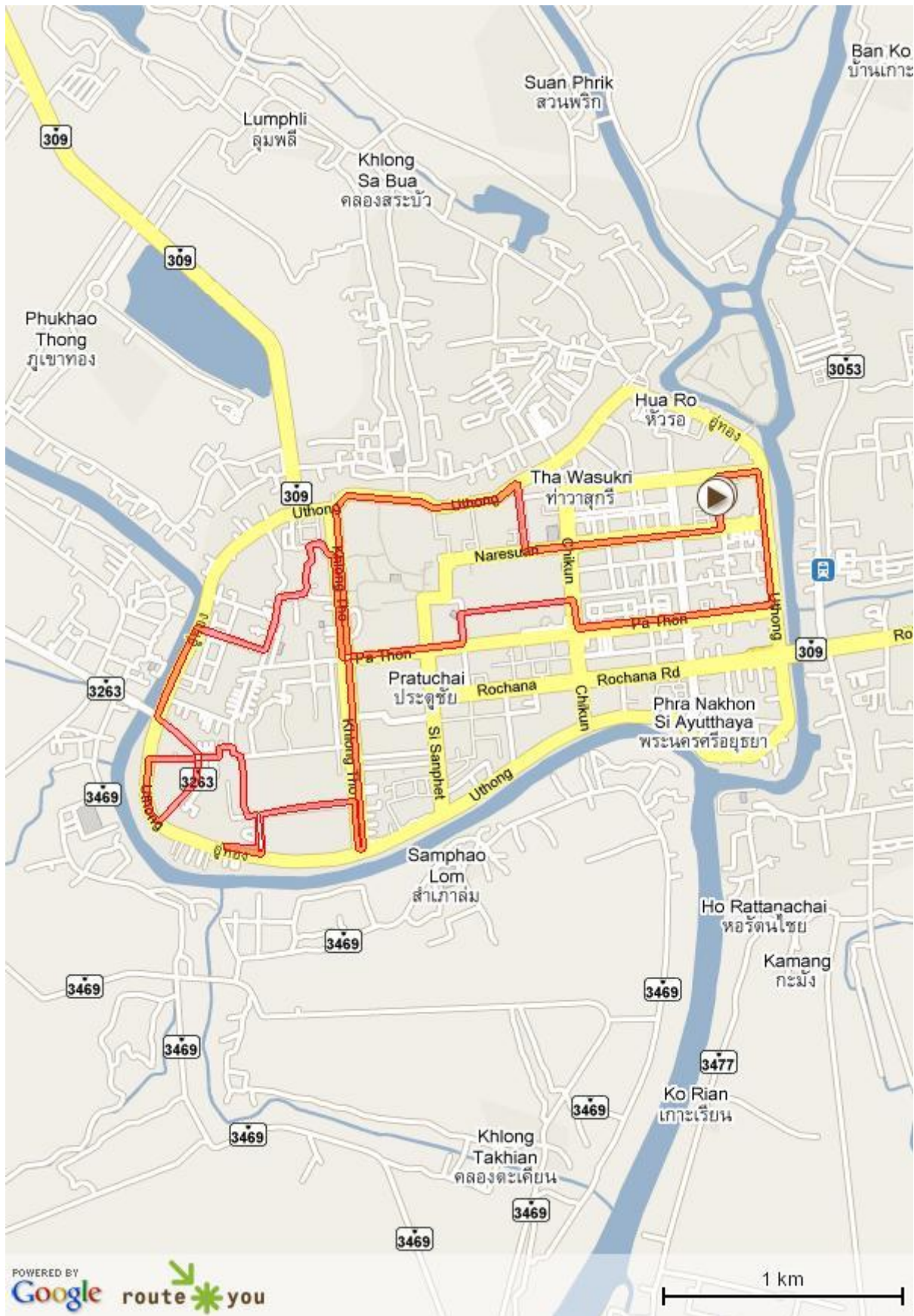
In emergency or accident:

Contact the Ayutthaya Tourist Police Station: (035) 241-446, (035) 242-352 or 1155.

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The route

Historical signboard in situ is marked as ()*

Entry fee required is marked as (\$)

- ❖ *From the starting point, bike toward Naresuan Road and make a right turn (you may need to walk your bike to the opposite side of the road). Go in the direction west for two blocks. You will arrive at Chikun Road in about 5 minutes. On your right you will see two small chedi and the ruins of a former bridge (Sapan Pathan). This marks the entrance point to the Ayutthaya Historical Park.*
- ❖ *Stay on Naresuan Road and bike through the intersection. Then take the first right hand turn. This will lead you along the west side of Wat Rachaburana, which will be on the right. On the left, you will also see a little known ruin. This is Wat Suwan Chedi.*

Wat Suwan Chedi was built in the middle Ayutthaya period, and later restored during the late Ayutthaya period. This ruin includes foundations to several buildings including sermon halls, several tall pillars, and parts of surviving Buddha images. There is evidence that its large bell-shaped chedi had once been layered with precious metals, presumably melted down around the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767.

- ❖ *Turn left at the end of the road. This will lead you through the area where elephants stables were once located during the Ayutthaya period. U-Thong road may be a bit busy with motor traffic, but you won't bike on it for long. The next two reference sites are active Buddhist monasteries, both on the left hand side of the road. They are situated very close to each other. Each is worth a close look, even though we've listed them only as Reference Points on this particular route. Note: directly across the street from Wat Yan Saen, on the opposite side of the road, you can see a section of an old water gate).*

Wat Yan Saen is an active monastery built on boundaries of an ancient site. Its highlight is an elegant and structurally well-balanced chedi similar to late-Ayutthaya period style of Chedi Si Suriyothai (also seen on this tour). Excavations on site revealed a building containing ropes for harnessing elephants. During the 1940s, many artifacts were discovered at this temple, including pottery and a Buddha image in the Lopburi style.

Wat Thammikarat is distinguished by its bell-shaped chedi, which is encircled by Khmer-style lions (*singh*) and graced with multi-headed Naga at its staircases. Other structures include a massive 19 x 53 meters ordination hall, and a building for housing a large reclining Buddha image. A replica of a giant bronze head is also in situ. The original dates to the U-Thong period and is now located at Chao Sam Phraya Museum in Ayutthaya. Wat Thammikarat likely pre-dates the founding of Ayutthaya by King U-Thong in 1351. Northern Thai chronicles state that Phraya Thammikarat, who was son of King Sai Nam Phung, constructed this monastery. Two centuries later, Prince Si Sin, the younger brother of 11-year-old King Yot Fa (who was executed in 1548), was once imprisoned at or near Wat

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Thammikarat by King Chakkraphat. Prince Si Sin latter launched a surprise attack on the Royal Palace and was killed by gunfire, shortly after forcing King Chakkraphat to flee. As a warning against future rebellions, the prince's colleagues and some of their wives were executed and impaled next to his body. In addition, in 1758, a revered monk from this temple helped prevent a civil war from breaking out by convincing King Uthumphon to abdicate the throne.

- ❖ *Continue biking west on U-Thong Road. On the left hand side you will be able to see the remains of the Royal Palace and a Ratanakosin-period temple named Wat Mai Chai Vichit. At the end of the Royal Palace there will be a canal. This is Khlong Tho (Khlong Chakrai Yai). Turn left and bike south. You will essentially cycle the entire length of this canal. You will see other sections of the Royal Palace on your left and a number of ruins on your right. Bypass these for now because you will return to this area at the end of this bike trek.*
- ❖ *Eventually, you will come to an intersection. On the opposite side of the road/canal, there will be the brick-and-mortar remains of an old water bridge from the Ayutthaya period.*

Saphan Lam Hoei was built over Khlong Chakrai Yai, a canal which connected the old Lopburi River in the north with the Chao Phraya River in the south at the Chakrai Yai Watergate. The bridge stood on the northeastern corner of Wat Khok Khamin (since destroyed). The bridge connected the road coming from behind the Rear Palace in the west, called Thanon Law or "Lao Street", with Thanon Talaeng Kaeng (Street of the Gallows), which connected further east to Thanon Pa Thon.

- ❖ *Cross the intersection and continue south. There will be a small ruin visible on the left immediately after the crossroad.*

Wat Jan is a small ruin that was situated beside Khlong Chakrai Yai. It has greatly eroded leaving little more than a basic foundation of a sermon hall in situ. There is not much known about its history or date of foundation. It is currently near the vicinity of the local Fine Arts Department and the TAT offices.

- ❖ *Keep biking south parallel of Khlong Tho (Khlong Chakrai Yai). In about 3-4 minutes, you will see another ruin on your left-hand side. This is the first Point-of-Interest on this bike route.*

Wat Som - There is no clear record of when Wat Som was established, however estimates based on the shape and decorative stucco of its main Khmer-style prang are suggestive of the early Ayutthaya period. Wat Som's Khmer-style prang has some of the best preserved stucco ornamentations of any temple in Ayutthaya. There are highly detailed geometric patterns and a number of mythological figures - including Rahu eating the moon during eclipse. Its lintels

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are especially worth a look. There is also the foundation of an ordination hall on site and several smaller chedi.

- ❖ *Continue biking south along the canal. You will clearly notice a large number of ruins on the opposite side of the road. This is your first glimpse of Somdet Phra Sri Nakharin Park. However, it is better to follow the canal another block to its end. Make a U-turn and proceed directly to the ruin at the corner of the park. The park does not charge any admissions fees at the time of this writing, so just lift your bike over the irritating strand of barbed wire at knee-cap level.*

Wat Chao Prab is a rather large and historically significant Buddhist monastery containing several structures and buildings. Its name is suggestive of a building used by kings to change into ceremonial clothing before visiting a monastery. King Chakkraphat, who reigned from 1548-1569, is most widely associated with the territory of present-day Sri Nakharin Park as it was his old neighborhood. The area around this monastery was once used by royal bodyguards, police, and soldiers.

Directly on the corner, there is a square brick structure that may have been an armory. This leads to a gateway marked by two chedi, one of which has been totally engulfed by a bodhi tree. An ordination hall is the primary feature, and its large bell-shaped chedi from the middle Ayutthaya period stands out. The ordination hall is surrounded by inner boundary walls with numerous niches where lanterns or Buddha images would have been placed. There is also a large secondary building made from laterite in an east to west axis. Its cross-shaped foundation is unusual for monasteries in the city.

- ❖ *The next historic site is situated directly north of Wat Chao Prab. You can either return to the canal road to bike there or use the small bridge connecting the two ruins together.*

Wat Ubosot - The exact date and history of Wat Ubosot is unknown. The monastery ruin features structures indicating mid-to-late Ayutthaya period. The primary features are a large redented chedi with a multi-tiered platform. There is a stairway on the south leading to the base of the chedi. The chedi has a triple redented square base representing the three worlds or the Traiphum. An ubosot (ordination hall) stood in front of the chedi. This ubosot has been altered in the Late Ayutthaya period. The area has been unlevelled, and a new sermon hall has been built on top of the foundations of the ubosot. The whole monastic area was once completely surrounded by a moat.

- ❖ *Return to the canal road and bike north for about one minute. There will be an important turning point at the next left hand turn. This will take you along a quiet road (Thanon Lek) through the center of Sri Nakharin Park. The corner will be marked by another ruin, Wat Chao Phram, but it is surrounded by a moat and inaccessible.*

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Wat Chao Phram - The Fine Arts Department lists Wat Chao Phram's construction date as the early Ayutthaya period, and evidence suggests that its Khmer-influenced prang-tower was restored in the late Ayutthaya period. The prang style has a hollow entrance on its eastern side that is full of bats. There are traces of a former sermon hall, but this has eroded to the basic foundation.

- ❖ *Continue biking west along Thanon Lek. The next three sites will be clearly visible on the right hand side of the road, but a small canal will separate you from them. The trick to having a closer look is to visit the memorial statue of H.R.H Princess Sri Nagarindra Borommaracha Chonani first. It will be on an elevated platform made of cement (also on your right hand side). You may have to dismount and walk your bike over an arched bridge to access the monument. However, this monument serves as an important reference point for the next few stages of this bike route.*
- ❖ *From the Sri Nakharin monument, look for a small dirt path heading east. The next four sites will be clearly in sight, but you might have to navigate around some muddy area to reach them.*

Wat Chedi Yai is characterized by its large bell-shaped chedi. This structure has a ring of missing bricks on its outer layer, showing how it had been expanded over time. There are traces of a moat around this monastery, which can still flood with water during rainy season. Wat Chedi Yai was most likely built during the Middle Ayutthaya period. Little is known about its history. There are no other structures in situ at this monastery.

- ❖ *It can be reasonably argued that the next two historic sites actually belonged to one monastery. However, the Fine Arts Department lists them as two separate entities. In order to see them, circle around Wat Chedi Yai and look for a small dirt path leading north. The next sites are in clear view, but moat-like surroundings can make them difficult to access. Look for a small footbridge over the shallow canal. This will allow you to see both sites. When you are done, backtrack to the monument for H.R.H Princess Sri Nagarindra Borommaracha Chonani.*

Wat Sangkha Thae is comprised of a single sermon hall (vihara) that has been renovated to the basic foundation level. This structure's junk-shaped base is typical of the Late Ayutthaya style. There are no traces of chedi on site. The only other structure in situ is a tower that was used to hold a bell or drum, which is the source of its name. The whole complex is surrounded by a moat.

Wat Sangkha Tha has several structures in situ that make it worth the effort of finding it. This ruin consists of two monastic structures including an ordination hall (ubosot) and a sermon hall (vihara), both with separate chedi. The chedi of the vihara at the west resembled the Lanna or Haripunchai style. It has three tiers and multiple redentations on an octagonal base. Several standing Buddha images are partly visible in niches of its relic chamber. The ordination hall at the east has a Sinhalese-styled chedi on a square base. The bell-shaped dome rests on a three-leveled platform.

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Its historical background and construction period are unknown, but Royal Chronicles mention that Reverend Yan Rakkhit of the Holy Royal Synod's Division of Meditation Matters was living in 1755 at the Monastery of Sangkatha. He was invited by King Borommakot (r. 1733-1758) to come and study the methods of the way of holy transcendental meditation within the residence of the Reverend Professor of the Monastery of Binding and Overlaying in order to control the weather during the dedication of the Monastery of Phraya Kham.

- ❖ *Backtrack to the monument of H.R.H Princess Sri Nagarindra Borommaracha Chonani, and then cross the arched bridge back over to Thanon Lek. Take the nearby crossroad leading south. This small street will lead to the park's southern entrance gate. On the right hand side, you will see a ruin immediately at the entrance. The next two sites can be seen by walking in the direction west from the entrance gate. Both are easy to see along U-Thong Road.*

Wat Luang Chi Krut is the ruins of a Buddhist monastery that is presently graced with a pleasant backdrop of coconut trees. In situ we find a large ordination hall (ubosot) and other monastic structures built on a classical east-west axis. To the west side of the ordination hall is a vihara constructed following a north-south axis. Excavations by the Fine Arts Department found evidence of three chedis in a north-south alignment at par with Wat Sri Sanphet. The whole monastic area was surrounded by an outer wall called Kamphaeng Kaew (crystal wall). It is obvious that his monastery has been restored many times. Before ascending the throne as King Chakkraphat (r. 1548-1569), had his residence in this area. This temple was likely used by high ranking officials of royal blood for Buddhist veneration.

Wat Wang Chai (Monastery of the Palace of Victory) was situated behind one of the fortresses guarding the city. It used to be connected to an older port – opposite from Khlong Takhian and St. Joseph Cathedral. Prince Thianracha, after ascending to the throne in 1548 as King Chakkraphat, ordered this monastery to be built on his former estate. The area around Wat Wang Chai was once the living quarters of many palace workers and governing officials. There are several large structures in situ. The highlights are its large octagonal chedi and ordination hall. On the altar of the ubosot is a huge Buddha image without a head or arms. Many fragmented parts of Buddha images rest nearby. In addition there are several smaller structures on this monastery's property including several sermon halls and chedi. The Fine Arts Department has restored this temple a number of times.

- ❖ *The next stage of this bike route can be a bit confusing to follow. Nevertheless, start by returning once again to the monument for H.R.H Princess Sri Nagarindra Borommaracha Chonani. Behind this statue, on its western side, there are two dirt paths leading north. Take the first path, the one closest to the monument. There had once been a ruin named Wat Hoi Kong at this site, but it has since been destroyed. Start biking north.*
- ❖ *The dirt path will lead through some empty trash-covered property, and a small canal will be situated a little to the west (your left hand side). The dirt path will eventually*

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meet with a short paved road that is in poor condition (and a dead end). You will see a small private business and some residential neighborhoods to the west. Unfortunately, Ayutthaya's public administrators have yet to connect the two parts of Sri Nakharin Park by a proper road, so you have to navigate the next step with some difficulty. There are two options possible. Whatever one you choose, remember that you must backtrack to this point shortly later.

- ❖ *The quickest and safest route is to look for a small clearing that is covered with trees. It will be on the left hand side, just after the first bend in the paved road. This will curve around the private business that is blocking the obvious route to the second half of Sri Nakharin Park. You will come out of the small clearing directly onto a road leading to the bridge for Highway 3263 (west of the city island). However, you should avoid going near the bridge. Look instead for a smaller road running from east to west through a large field. Take this route west a short distance toward U-Thong Road, and you will see the next reference point on the corner.*
- ❖ *The longer and more dangerous route is also an option. Stay with the small paved road for about a minute and it will lead to a proper road just north. Make a left and bike to U-Thong Road. This will bring you along a small, active, Buddhist monastery on your left hand side (Wat Sra Monthon). A canal will be on your right. Turn left on U-Thong Road and proceed south, bypassing the chaotic and dangerous motor traffic of the highway bridge. Don't get on the bridge by mistake. Pass the bridge and continue south. There will be a small ruin on the corner of the next road on your left hand side.*

Wat Phra Ngam - Little has survived of Wat Phra Ngam other than the basic foundation of a sermon hall. It was built along an east/west axis. The sermon hall was surrounded by an inner wall, and the whole complex was protected by an outer wall. The period of its construction is not known.

- ❖ *Ride your bike south along U-Thong Road for a minute or two. Keep your eyes open for a large ruin on the left hand side of the road. There will be a parking lot for you to turn your bike into. This is the best way to visit Wat Maha Saman, since a moat surrounds it in all other directions. On the opposite side of the road is the Siriyalai Palace, a modern residence for members of the Royal family.*

Wat Maha Saman (Monastery of the Great Deer) stands out due to its large bell-shaped chedi. In situ is also a restored ruin of an ubosot (ordination hall) with sema stones still visible. At its There are also traces of an inner wall. The temple is named after a type of deer endemic to Thailand. This monastery's name makes reference to the Jataka of the "Deer King", in which Buddha takes the form of a deer in a previous life and leads his herd in the Isipatanamarukatiyawan Forest. This forest is the actual Deer Park in Sarnath (North India) where Gautama Buddha first taught the Dharma to the group of five companions and where the Buddhist Sangha came into existence through the enlightenment of Kaundinya. The temple's name could also be translated "the rising morning", referring at the guardian deity of the Theravada Buddhist religion and Sri Lanka. Sumana Saman invited Lord Buddha to the

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Samanalakanda and on request Gautama Buddha left his foot print on the rock at top of the Sri Pada mountain (Adam's Peak) as a token of symbolic worship 2,580 year ago. Prince Sumana Saman latter became a god by the name God Maha Sumana Saman.

- ❖ *Ride your bike east on U-Thong for only a brief moment. You will take the first left hand turn possible, which will lead you to the road connecting to the bridge leading over to Highway 3263. Then make a right hand turn at the intersection, what brings you back on U-Thong Rd. Continue on this road, along the east bank of the Chao Phraya River for about 100 m. On your right side you will see Chedi Sri Suriyothai.*

Chedi Sri Suriyothai consists of a single but elaborately designed bell-shaped chedi. It has been gilded with gold paint from the relic chamber to the top of its spire, which adds to some amazing reflections at sunset. Its base is square with many redented corners, and there is an entrance on the northern side. According to Prince Damrong Rajanubhab, this monument contains the ashes of Queen Suriyothai. Royal Chronicles describe her as a heroic wife who died in battle while trying to save the life of King Chakkraphat. As the story goes, King Chakkraphat and two of his sons were leading an army into battle against Burmese troops. Queen Suriyothai, fearing for her family's safety, secretly dressed as a male soldier and rode an elephant into the fight. While fighting a Burmese general on the back of an elephant, King Chakkraphat's elephant stumbled, which put him at risk to his opponent's blade. Queen Suriyothai heroically charged in front of the enemy's weapon, sacrificing her own life in his place. In her honor, King Chakkraphat had a funeral monument and a preaching hall constructed on the site of her Royal cremation.

- ❖ *Return to the previous road that you were biking on and continue north once again. At the limit of the Queen Suriyothai park (on your right hand), you will find a small door in a closed fence. Pass through the door and follow the road ahead which runs over a bridge. At the intersection turn left. This will lead you directly to the next destination. The next historic site is Ayutthaya's largest and most popular reclining Buddha image. It is the final Point of Interest on this particular bike trek. It also doubles as an important connecting point with the Ayutthaya Historical Park bike route.*
- ❖ *Note: You may also want to visit Wat Worachetharam and Wat Rakhang, since these ruins are situated in the near vicinity of Wat Lokaya Sutharam. By all means have a look. However, neither of these sites are listed here, so please refer to Route #9 for more detailed information about them.*

Wat Lokaya Sutharam is a massive temple ruin designed in the late-Ayutthaya period style. At the eastern entrance are the remnants of three viharns. Behind these sermon halls is a large 30 meters high Khmer-style prang with a hollow entrance on its eastern side. However, the highlight of this former monastery is its enormous Reclining Buddha image (42 meters in length and 8 meters high), which has been named Phra Buddha Sai Yat. All the Buddha's toes are of equal lengths. The arm supporting the head is vertical, instead of being folded as in the early Ayutthaya and U-Thong periods. This vertical arm is a characteristic of reclining images made in the middle Ayutthaya period - after the 16th century. The reclining Buddha image is

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usually wrapped in brightly colored orange cloth. Many people have covered parts of the reclining Buddha image in gold leaf. There is an interesting Lanna-style chedi northwest of the reclining Buddha image. This chedi has an octagonal base and many niches contain standing Buddha images. There are also several meditating Buddha images near the spire. This type of architectural is associated with the Haripunchai Kingdom in Lamphun.

The reclining Buddha image was restored in 1954 by the Alcoholic Beverages Factory. It was restored again in 1956 when Field Marshall Phibun Songkhram was developing the city park. In 1989, the family of former Prime Minister Luang Thamrongwasawat (1946-1947) contributed to renovations at this monastery. The Fine Arts department has continued to maintain it since then.

- ❖ ***Return Route:** At this point, you have the option of linking with the Ayutthaya Historical Park trek (see Bike Route #9 on this website for more detailed information). In this case, you can slowly return while making many scenic stops at historic sites along the way. Also check out Route #9 for more historical detail on Wat Worachetharam and Wat Rakhang.*
- ❖ *However the official route of this bike tour returns at this point without making any more stops. Therefore, ride your bike in the direction east toward Khlong Tho (Khlong Chakrai Yai). You can easily do this from Wat Lokaya Sutharam. Make a right a bike parallel to the canal for one block and then turn left at the intersection. Saphan Lam Hoei will be on the right and Wat Jan will be situated diagonally on the opposite side of the road. Turn left onto Patone Road and start biking east.*
- ❖ *Alternatively, you could return to the previous intersection mentioned, just south of Chedi Si Suriyothai, and make a left turn. Then start biking east past Saphan Lam Hoei and Wat Jan.*
- ❖ *The key to the remaining return route is to simply keep biking east on Pa thon Road until you arrive at Khlong Makham Riang (formerly Khlong Nai Kai). This will take about 15 minutes. In this time you will bypass Ayutthaya Historic Park. You will see on your left a small elephant kraal, Wat Ket, and Wat Phra Ram. On your right, there is the city pillar and Wat Pha Pai. Once you have arrived at Chikun Road, which marks the end of Ayutthaya Historic Park boundaries, there will be a large roundabout in the middle of the road. Go through it and continue east. There will be another temple on the left hand side, Wat Kraji, but this one is easy to miss because it is surrounded by tall trees.*
- ❖ *When you have finally reached Khlong Makham Riang, make a left turn and proceed few north for several blocks until arriving at Naresuan Road once again. You might be able to glimpse Wat Langka on the corner on the opposite side of the canal. Turn right on Naresuan and continue biking east until you come to the next left hand turn. This returns you to the starting point.*

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